

THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Commissioner of Education
President of the University of the State of New York
89 Washington Avenue, Room 111

E-mail: commissioner@mail.nysed.gov
Twitter: @JohnKingNYSED
Tel: (518) 474-5844

Some Republicans and business leaders support high standards while others don't. Some Democrats and civil rights leaders support student-focused evaluations for teachers and principals and some don't.

Some folks align with unions while others keep their distance. Some demand accountability while others fight it. And often, those with the most to gain are not in the fight at all.

Sometimes, these debates focus on real issues and there are honest disagreements that can lead to productive compromise. But sometimes the conversation devolves into extraordinarily personal attacks, which should have no place in open civic discourse.

Civility and respect should be the price of admission in public debate. Its opposite is not only inappropriate but it has the dishe

Partly – this is New York’s character. New Yorkers have deeply-held beliefs and we’re willing to stand up for them – and even fight for them. It’s one of the things that makes us great.

But that doesn’t justify the kind of degrading rhetoric that increasingly fills our newspapers and airwaves. Every confrontation does not need to end with one side declaring victory and the other side retreating in defeat.

We can achieve shared victories -- and that’s especially true in public education, where there should be more acknowledgment of the facts and common aspirations –

Every single child deserves an effective education and the parents and taxpayers who hired us have a right to know whether we are getting the job done. And -- if New York is not getting it done – then I am accountable. We are all accountable.

That's the bargain at the heart of public education. Parents trust us with their children and the people of the state give us billions and billions of dollars each year – and what they ask in return is that we deliver results – and prove it.

And that gets to two issues that are really at the heart of all the drama here in New York in recent months: the first is testing and the second is evaluation.

Many New York parents have expressed frustration with testing and I understand where they are coming from. Testing is not teaching. Testing is not the point of education. Testing does not make our children smarter. It just tells us where we are so we can get better.

Unfortunately, the facts around testing seem to get lost. First of all, the new Common Core tests are a much better reflection of the skills students will need for college and career success. They rely less on multiple choice and require students to write more. They ask students to critically analyze challenging texts and to apply their math skills to real world problems. They are better tests.

Second, New York State has not added any new tests since adopting the Common Core standards. In fact, we have made every effort to simultaneously improve our tests and reduce testing time.

Today, the total testing time for those state tests accounts for less than one percent of the instructional time in the school year. I want to say that again: since New York State

evaluation relies on classroom observation and other factors like feedback from parents and students.

Again – 60% has nothing to do with test scores – so anyone who says that evaluation is all about test scores is wrong. They're misinforming people to stir up anxiety and fear among teachers and parents – and that's having a negative effect on students.

Right now – as we speak -- we have only one year of test results that measure the new standards. We have not identified any new schools for intervention. Not a single teacher or

I was inspired and reassured listening to them describe the powerful conversations they are having with colleagues.

It affirmed for me what I have always known: That there is no educational challenge in New York that is beyond the reach of our educators, our schools, our parents and our students. But it will ask more of each of us.

Schools of education need to rethink how they train teachers. Elected officials must take greater responsibility for fully and equitably funding our schools and I am grateful to the

This is a historic moment and an opportunity to lead the whole country. I have never been more confident because I know there are tens of thousands of smart and dedicated teachers across this state that share Mr. Osterweil's passion and commitment. They're devoted to their students and willing to do whatever it takes to help them get over the bar we have set for ourselves.

I know there are millions of parents across this state who want only the best for their children and who are willing to be good partners with their children's teachers in meeting those goals.

There are elected officials all across New York who don't want to take sides among adults fighting over reform. They just want to be on the side of children and what is best for them.

I also know that even my most ardent critics in the teachers union share the goal of providing the best education possible to every child in our state – and just because we don't agree on everything – does not make us enemies.

One of the gifts my mother gave me when I was little was that she taught me to look for the good in everyone. I hope that we can all see the good in each other and begin to move forward together – because the alternative is unthinkable.

Children have been waiting for too long for the education they desperately need, while the adults have become paralyzed by the politics of education. We can't get back a single day stolen from our children because we could not find common ground.

We all have to own that and accept responsibility for every missed opportunity and that means we have to resolve here and now not to let another day go by where we are arguing about process instead of delivering an effective education to children.

Not another day should go by when we are more concerned with making ourselves look good and making others look bad, because we all look bad and nothing good comes of it.

I know that this work is difficult for some. I know this is scary for some. But anything worthwhile is going to be difficult and scary sometimes. It's been difficult for me as well. I didn't seek or invite the antagonism and acrimony – but it's there and it's real and I don't dismiss it.

I just hope we're all a little bit stronger for it and a little bit chastened by the recent